

TWIN PEAKS WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

1. THE STUDY AREA - 90,791 acres

The Twin Peaks WSA (CA-020-619A) is located in Lassen County, California (7,079 acres) and in Washoe County, Nevada (83,712 acres). The WSA contains 90,791 acres of public land and surrounds 1,257 acres of private land located in 12 parcels varying in size from 40 to 320 acres.

The western boundary is the Smoke Creek Ranch, private land, and the Smoke Creek Reservoir Road. The southern boundary is formed by portions of the Burro Mountain road and an underground communication cable right-of-way. The eastern boundary follows the Sand Pass-Gerlach road, an unnamed north-south road and the Buffalo Meadows road. The northern boundary follows the Parsnip Creek road, the Mixie Flat road and the Horne Springs-Painter Flat road.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE - 54,916 acres recommended for wilderness

47,837 acres recommended for wilderness in Nevada

35,875 acres recommended for nonwilderness

The recommendation for this WSA is to designate 54,916 acres as wilderness and release 35,875 acres for uses other than wilderness. Within California 7,079 acres are recommended for wilderness and 18,598 acres are recommended for other uses. Within Nevada 47,837 acres are recommended for wilderness and 17,277 acres are recommended for other uses.

The area recommended for wilderness provides excellent opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. The sinuous canyons and riparian zones along these two perennial streams add special scenic, ecological, and wildlife interest to the area. Year-round water supplies provide habitat and watering areas for desert and aquatic species. Opportunities for viewing wildlife are good. Deer, antelope, chukar, golden, eagles, wildhorses and burros are prevalent.

The not recommended for wilderness areas are separated from the recommended wilderness primarily because of its flat low rolling hills that are more drab and monotonous than the central mountainous core of the unit. Most of existing ways and small man-made features are in these areas cause them to be less natural than the pristine core area. A secondary reason for dropping these areas are that these areas are regionally important for upland game hunters who rely on motorized access to get to the hunting areas.

3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

A. Naturalness: The Twin Peaks WSA is predominantly natural, with human imprints unnoticeable in the area as a whole. The WSA contains steep canyons, numerous peaks and ridges, many small springs and two perennial streams. Plant life is a mixture of big and low sage, grasses and sparsely-scattered junipers. Elevations range from 3,900' on the eastern side of the WSA along the edge of the Smoke Creek Desert to 6,572' atop Twin Peaks located in the south central portion of the WSA.

The overall influence of human imprints on the naturalness of the area is negligible. Human imprints are small in scale mainly related to livestock grazing such as, 9 miles of fence, 2 stock ponds, 8 developed springs, one pipeline, one enclosure, and one well with windmill, 38 miles of access ways leading to various springs and ponds.

One 1/2-mile long abandoned dirt airstrip located on the south western edge of the WSA was not identified during the initial inventory. It is low profile and is no longer used.

B. Solitude: The Twin Peaks WSA contains outstanding opportunities for solitude. The WSA's large size and the numerous canyons, rims, ridges and peaks provide excellent opportunities to experience solitude. Livestock operator travel within the WSA is seasonal and infrequent. Hunting is the only regular public use that effects solitude within the WSA and it occurs from October through December.

This WSA is periodically overflowed by military aircraft which creates temporary effects on solitude.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation: Excellent opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation occur throughout most of the WSA. Hunting, hiking, horseback riding, sightseeing, wildlife observation, and nature study are the major activities best suited to the recommended wilderness area.

D. Special Features: The Smoke Creek Archaeological District is located along the southwestern side of the WSA on both sides of Smoke Creek. It has been declared eligible for National Register status by the California State Historic Preservation Officer. The district extends 1/2 to 1 mile wide along Smoke Creek as well as 1 to 2 miles up major tributaries of Smoke Creek. Archaeological resources in the district include high quality petroglyph panels, habitation caves and hunting blinds. All of the district lies within the WSA and 50% of the district is included within the area recommended for wilderness designation.

4. MANAGEABILITY

The area recommended for wilderness could be managed to preserve wilderness values. No current or expected activities in the area would impair wilderness values. The recommended area is entirely BLM land with no private inholdings. Boundaries are manageable and follow ridgecrests, legal lines, private property lines, or boundary roads located in canyons where off road use is limited by steep or rocky terrain.

Closure of four access ways at the recommended area boundaries will be feasible due to terrain features. Closure of the remaining four access ways (8 miles) is necessary to maintain the wilderness qualities of solitude and naturalness in the core of the suitable area. In one area on the southeast side of the recommended area where slopes are broad and open, enforcement may be needed to insure compliance with motorized use closures.

The area not recommended for wilderness contains broad open terrain readily accessible to four-wheel-drive vehicles. Effective closure of these ways and prohibition of vehicle use through these open areas would require frequent patrol from August through December. Due to the open nature of the terrain and the low growing sagebrush vegetation, any barriers could easily be driven around by determined drivers and make manageability difficult.

Management and coordination of military overflights will be a consideration.

5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES

BLM data and information from the Barringer Report (1982) in the Affected Environment section of the Eagle Lake-Cedarville Wilderness EIS (1987), indicated that the WSA has a low favorability for the accumulation of mineral resources. The probability for gas and oil resources is low and the WSA was not considered prospectively valuable for geothermal.

Interest in mineral exploration indicated by a BLM minerals record search on January 13, 1988 showed that no mining claims or mineral leases existed within the Twin Peaks WSA.

A mineral survey of the suitable portion of the WSA was conducted by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), and the U.S. Bureau of Mines (BOM) during 1985. Their final report was published in USGS

Bulletin 1706-A (1988). The BOM conducted an extensive literature search for records of past or present mining activity. There was no evidence that mining activity occurred in the WSA.

The BOM sampling confirmed the geochemical anomalies of the Barringer Report (1982) for lead, zinc, silver and copper near Mixie Flat within the WSA. New data showed the presence of gold, nickel, tungsten, mercury, and chromium (Miller, 1987). Although the concentration of the samples indicated the Mixie Flat area only has moderate potential for gold, and low potential for copper, and zinc. The entire WSA has low resource potential for copper, tungsten, and zinc based on geochemical sampling. Sampling also identified lake sediments in the southeast and southwest corners of the WSA that have high potential for pozzolan, a porous variety of volcanic tuff or ash used in making hydraulic cement.

6. SUMMARY OF WSA-SPECIFIC PUBLIC COMMENTS

In the Eagle Lake-Cedarville Wilderness EIS that included the Twin Peaks WSA, the Susanville District Advisory Council identified the following interests and resources to be represented on an eight member Technical Review Team (TRT): livestock-adjacent land owners; wildlife-agencies-sportsmen-wilderness-environmental-dispersed recreation; minerals-energy-utilities, wild horses; motorized recreation; cultural-historical-archeological; BLM. The TRT members agreed that a partial-wilderness recommendation was appropriate for the Twin Peaks WSA. The partial-wilderness recommendation was supported by the Susanville District Advisory Council and by BLM and is the recommended action for this WSA.

Key issues analyzed by the TRT and in the EIS were: a wilderness complex where five adjacent WSA's separated only by boundary roads including Twin Peaks WSA would be managed as a wilderness complex inclusive of the road; the quality of the wilderness resources and how much was appropriate to be preserved and managed as wilderness; concern that wilderness would prevent mineral development, livestock management activities; motorized recreation access; concern that wilderness would limit management of wild horses and burro populations; concern that wilderness would preclude development of high voltage electric transmission lines through the region.

339 comments were received that addressed this WSA specifically or as part of general comments on all WSA's in the draft EIS. Of those 339 comments, 12 were oral statements received at the three public hearings held on the draft EIS and 327 were written comments. 36 respondents supported all wilderness, 7 supported no wilderness and 291 supported partial wilderness recommended by BLM. Five respondents supported more wilderness than was addressed in the draft EIS.

Those favoring wilderness cited the area's natural character, large size, opportunities for primitive recreation and opportunities for solitude. Inclusion of the area in the National Wilderness Preservation System as a representative of volcanic land forms in the desert shrub ecosystem was also cited.

Those opposed to wilderness cited concern that despite livestock's grandfathered provisions in the wilderness act livestock management activities, particularly motorized access for water facility inspection and maintenance and sheep camp movement, would be restricted. Restrictions or prohibition on development of new springs and stock ponds, was cited as reasons for opposition to wilderness. Others opposed to wilderness cited the elimination of mineral development in designated wilderness.

The following local and state agencies supported the draft EIS partial wilderness alternative: Nevada County (California) Supervisor Joel Gustafson; The State of Nevada through the Nevada Clearinghouse; The Nevada Division of State Parks; The California Department of Fish and Game. Lassen County Board of Supervisors supported the No Wilderness alternative.